

## VRCs Tasks Once a Major Disaster Strikes

- **Receiving volunteers** – The VRC facility choice and design must facilitate efficient movement of volunteers from place to place as they go through the registration and placement process, in such a way as to minimize confusion. The workspace must be able to handle large numbers of people and supplies. Because the VRC will be operating in a disaster area, it is important that it have a reliable power source that is also strong enough to handle office equipment needs. There must be sufficient space set aside for a waiting area (protected from any bad weather, high/low temperatures, etc), restrooms, interviewing rooms, areas for information management, and spaces for staff to take breaks and store belongings, among others. Parking will also be an issue of space if volunteers will be arriving by car. All facilities must comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- **Processing (registering) volunteers** – As spontaneous volunteers arrive, they must be quickly processed in order to prevent long delays that might frustrate them or lead them to avoid the VRC entirely. Greeters can distribute instructions on what volunteering will entail, and ask volunteers to begin filling out registration forms. A brief orientation, which welcomes volunteers, explains the mission of the VRC, describes the disaster and the volunteer operations, introduces safety information, and answers immediate questions volunteers may have, may be given as volunteers wait to be interviewed. If long lines exist, or the registration, interview and placement process requires a long time, arrangements must be made to provide water (and possibly food) to waiting volunteers. Translators should be present to help process volunteers who speak languages other than English. If not all of the volunteers can be processed in a single day, a system must be enacted by which the overflow of registrants is moved either to a following day or to an alternate location.

Suggested information that may be collected for each volunteer during registration includes:

- Full name
- Age (is the volunteer under or over 18?)
- Physical description (must be optional - height, weight, blood type, hair/eye color)
- Permanent and temporary contact addresses
- Permanent and temporary phone/fax/e-mail
- Emergency contact information
- Availability (start and end dates, days of the week, times of each day)
- Occupation
- Skills (languages, communications, computer, counseling, teaching, heavy equipment operation, cooking, medical, etc.)
- Previous emergency training/certification/licenses (they should be able to provide proof of licensure)

- Task preferences (willing to provide animal care, animal rescue, child care, clean-up, damage assessment, data entry, driving, etc.)
  - Work condition preferences (indoors, outdoors, day, night)
  - Geographic preferences (especially for disasters affecting large geographic areas)
  - Resources the volunteer can offer (car, truck, machinery, boat, tools, etc.)
  - Physical limitations
  - Association with a group
  - Criminal background
- **Interviewing volunteers** – Once volunteers have been registered, an interview will be conducted to help those in charge of placement most successfully match volunteers and recipient organizations. The interview will explore the volunteer’s motivation for volunteering, skills, interests, hobbies, training, availability, work preferences, limitations, background (e.g., criminal history), and other information. Possible questions interviewers might ask include:
    - Why have you decided to volunteer?
    - What skills do you have which may be useful as a disaster volunteer?
    - Are you prepared to work in a possibly stressful, unfamiliar situation?
    - Do you speak any language other than English?
    - What type of volunteer work would you like to do?
    - Have you ever volunteered in a disaster situation before?
    - Do you prefer to work alone, with a partner, or in a group?
    - Do you have your own transportation?
    - Do you have any questions about volunteering?
    - Are you under 18?
- **Placement** – The need for additional manpower is acute in times of disaster, and most response and recovery organizations, both governmental and nongovernmental, will have a good idea of their specific needs. Volunteer managers will have an accurate log of these needs through prior outreach to these groups aimed at data collection. Then, using the information gained through the interview process, they can begin placing volunteers with organizations that are most likely to meet both the volunteers’ and the organizations’ needs. Organizations will have given the VRC a list of the types of workers they need, the work that they will be conducting, the hours and locations of work, among other information that will be useful to the volunteer placement specialist. Those specialists will then work with the volunteers to make a satisfactory placement decision, and put the volunteer in touch with a supervisor within the recipient organization. The volunteer will likely be provided with badging (such as an ID tag or a bracelet) that identifies the volunteer and indicates the agency for which they are authorized to work.
- **Training** – As most volunteers have never worked in a disaster situation before, they will need to be trained in basic safety skills. Then, as needed for specific

jobs, volunteers may be provided with training that provides them with more specific skills relative to their assignment. This training may take place at the VRC, or at the organization with whom the volunteer is placed.